

INFORMATIONAL MEMORANDUM - KY-FD-IM-S-01-04

TO: All Food Service Directors

FROM: Sarah Castanis, Director  
Division of Food Distribution

DATE: August 30, 2000

SUBJECT: USDA Beef Specifications

USDA-Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) announced on June 23, 2000, new requirement for ground beef, pork and turkey products purchased by USDA for distribution to schools and other Federal food and nutrition programs. The new requirements include microbial testing. Because the ground products are delivered to programs that serve children and other high risk individuals, these new requirements are designed to raise safety assurance levels for the products.

These new requirements will and have delayed ground beef, pork and turkey shipments. All beef request made for August shipment have been delayed to September, these are the only changes in ship periods that we are aware of at this time. If the delays in shipment continue, you will be forced to purchase ground beef at the beginning of the school year and will be overstocked with ground beef at the end of the school year and forced to store the product over the summer months. USDA is working with industry to implement the new requirements and to find ways to get commodity purchases back on schedule.

Also, the additional safety requirements incorporated in the specifications may, at least initially, result in higher prices for ground beef. This time last year the State of Kentucky had received approximately 357 thousand pounds (9 trucks) of beef. For the same time period this school year, approximately 40 thousand pounds (1 truck) has been purchased at prices ranging from .30 cents to .54 cents per pound higher. The price increase may effect the overall volume of ground beef the recipient agency may be receiving for the year.

The ground beef situation has caused disruption in the commodity products sent to recipient agencies directly and those made available to State-approved processors for processing. You should be prepared to initially alter menus or to purchase commercial ground beef products until deliveries are fully back on track.

Should you want to express your concerns about how these new specifications will effect your school lunch program, please write to Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman and your Congressional Representatives. Enclosed is a sample letter that should be revised to encompass your particular concerns.

If you have questions or concerns that you would like to share with this office, please contact Teresa Ulery at 502-564-0366 ext. 261 or your Commodity Advisory Council Member.

SC/tu

Enclosure

(DATE)

Secretary Dan Glickman  
U. S. Department of Agriculture  
14<sup>th</sup> Street and Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Glickman:

I am a School Food Service Director in the State of Kentucky. I rely heavily on our USDA Commodity entitlement beef and pork. My commodity entitlement is critical for me to maintain the nutritional integrity of the meals served to students in a cost-effective manner.

I am writing because I am concerned about the decreased level of purchases made by USDA for beef, compared to the level that was purchased last year at this time. I understand this is the result of a newly implemented, additional, pathogen-testing requirement on raw ground beef purchases in the commodity program. The National School Lunch Program was developed to provide much needed assistance to farmers, while at the same time providing schools with commodity products that would allow us to serve our students a nutritious meal at an affordable price. This change in policy will negatively affect the farming community and the school food service programs that depend on their products.

While I applaud USDA's effort to maintain the highest possible food safety standards, I am concerned that the process of implementation is destined to have a severe impact on school lunches through the United States. This concern is being expressed at all levels throughout Kentucky. Purchases may resume but schools will be left with an overstock of product at the worst possible time of year. Further, there has been no indication from USDA on whether they intend to resume the purchases with other product, or if there are any intentions to take a strong stand to solve the problem - quickly. I am very concerned that this situation is perceived by USDA to be a small "inconvenience". For the school lunch programs this is much more critical than a mere inconvenience, and the delay will cost school food service programs regardless of when the purchases resume.

I would appreciate your quick attention to this critical situation. Schools need to plan menus in advance and we need to know the status of the bid process and USDA's intentions soon. We also need to be assured of a plan to prevent this from happening again. Thank you for addressing this issue in an expedient manner.

Sincerely,



